

A Study of Selected Representative Organ Pieces by Rachel Laurin

By

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Sho Shirley Cheng

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### **Abstract**

Over the course of the last decade the organ works of Canadian composer Rachel Laurin (b. 1961) have gained critical acclaim among professional organists. Her organ music has captured the attention of American and Canadian organists, resulting in a series of commissions for new organ works. To date, there are over thirty-two compositions for organ solo. This document explores stylistic issues in Laurin's compositions for solo organ and for organ with other instruments. Pieces that have been selected for in-depth study include *Chromatic Fantasetta*, *Scherzetto*, *Toccatarina (to Katarina)* and *Asian Legend* from *Twelve Short Pieces, Volume 3*, op. 64, *Étude Héroïque*, Op.38, and the *Sonata for Organ and Horn*, Op.60, II. *On a Painting by Thomson*. At the outset of the document an overview of Canadian organ culture is provided, followed by an introduction to Laurin's life and works. Subsequently, a structural and harmonic analysis of Laurin's compositions is presented. As this analysis will reveal, the expressive dimensions of her works embrace elements of Romanticism and Impressionism.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to express my appreciation to all the members of my graduate committee for their support and assistance. I would like to especially thank Dr. Michael Bauer, my major professor, for his patience and guidance throughout my graduate studies.

## Introduction

Rachel Laurin is one of the foremost contemporary Canadian composers for the organ. Her contribution to the organ repertoire includes two organ symphonies, a concerto for organ, string orchestra and timpani, five suites, and many pieces for organ and one or more additional instruments. The purpose of this study is to examine selected, representative organ compositions by Rachel Laurin in an attempt to arrive at a general understanding of her style of composing for the instrument.

In order to do this, I will briefly examine the Canadian organ world, including organs and organ composition. In addition, I will discuss Rachel Laurin's biography and the various French and German traditions that influenced her along the way. This will help to provide a context for the work she is doing as an organist and a composer. Finally, in order to gain a deeper understanding of Laurin's organ music and its stylistic features, a number of organ compositions will be discussed in detail. These works include the *Chromatic Fantasetta*, *Scherzetto*, *Toccatina (to Katarina)* and *Asian Legend* from Laurin's *Twelve Short Pieces, Volume 3*, op. 64, her *Étude Héroïque*, op. 38, and the *Sonata for Organ and Horn*, op. 60, II. *On a Painting by Thomson*. These pieces come from different periods of her career and exhibit somewhat different approaches to the questions of form and style. In addition to offering some thoughts about structural function, harmonic analysis and rhythmic devices, I will consider issues of performance practice, including registration and articulation. Suggestions for interpretation have come from studying the scores, examining the secondary literature on Laurin's organ music, and working with the composer herself.

## Organ Heritage in Canada

Canada has nourished a richly varied organ culture for at least 350 years. The province of Québec, where Laurin grew up, has a rich heritage of organ builders, organs, organists and composers. Québec has made a significant contribution to Canadian organ culture as well as to the wider landscape of Canadian music. The first organ in Québec was recorded in *Le Journal des Jésuites*. It was built for the Jesuit chapel in Québec City as early as 1661.<sup>1</sup> Since then a lively relationship between organists and organ builders has ensued. The most significant moment in the development of organ building in Québec came in 1879 when, following their work with John Abbey in Versailles and their time with the famous French builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, Cleaver and Samuel Casavant established their shop in Saint-Hyacinthe.<sup>2</sup> In many cases Rachel Laurin's music has been written for and performed on instruments built by this renowned firm. The variety of colors offered by their organs is integral to the successful performance of Laurin's music.

The increasing availability of pipe organs in Canada created a greater demand for music for the instrument. *Feen*, the first Canadian organ solo written to be performed in church, was composed by Frederick Glackemeyer in 1807. It was classical in style and inspired by dance

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<sup>1</sup>Gilles Maurice Leclerc, "A Brief Historical Survey of Organ Music in the Province of Québec," *The American Organist* 43, no. 4 (2009): 42-44.

<sup>2</sup> David Palmer, "Organs of Canada: A Performer's Sampling of Delights," *The American Organist*, 43, no.3 (2009): 68-70.

idioms.<sup>3</sup> A few organ pieces by nineteenth-century Canadian composers survived. Among them are two prelude and fugue sets by J.E.P Aldous, *Concert Overture* by J. Humfrey Anger, *Prelude and Fugue* by W.O. Forsyth, three pieces by Charles A.E. Harriss, and a *Grand Choeur* by William Reed.<sup>4</sup>

Because of Canada's historical involvement with both Britain and France, there are, likewise, dual schools of organ composers in Canada, hailing from British and French roots. Perhaps the principal composer from the British tradition is Healey Willan, who came to Canada from England in 1913 and added a number of fine original compositions to the growing body of Canadian organ works. Significant pieces by Willan include his *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue* from 1916, the *Five Preludes on Plainsong Melodies* of 1950, and his final large work, the *Passacaglia and Fugue No. 2* written in 1959. Willan is often referred to as the "Dean of Canadian Organ Composers." Other notable Anglo-Canadian composers include Gerald Bales, Barrie Cabena, Derek Healey, Florence Clark and Graham George. Their works, composed between 1956 and 2002, demonstrate a variety of English compositional techniques of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Elaine Keillor, *Music in Canada: Capturing Landscape and Diversity* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 114.

<sup>4</sup> "Organ composition – The Canadian Encyclopedia," last modified November 10, 2014, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/organ-composition-emc/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Organ Music and Organ Building – The Canadian Encyclopedia," last modified November 23, 2014, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/organ-music-and-organ-building/>.

In 1885, Achille Fortier (1864-1939) was the first Canadian student to be accepted into the Paris Conservatoire.<sup>6</sup> He was one of a number of Québec's notable organ teachers in the first half of the twentieth century who were students of French masters. These included Maurice Dela, Roger Miatton, François Morel and Raymond Daveluy. Their teachers were such notable figures as Louis Vierne, Marcel Dupré, Maurice Duruflé and Charles-Marie Widor.<sup>7</sup> Upon their return from France, these Canadian students began teaching in colleges and schools or privately.

The Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal was one such school. It was established by the provincial government of Québec in 1943. Modeled on the French conservatory system, it soon began to graduate many fine organists, including Maurice Dela and Raymond Daveluy. Raymond Daveluy stands out for his major contribution of six monumental sonatas, an organ concerto, a number of chorales preludes, and a *Messe en l'honneur de Saint-Joseph* (1952) for mixed choir, organ and brass.<sup>8</sup> Daveluy has played throughout North America as well as in Europe and East Asia. Known as a highly skilled improviser, Daveluy taught at McGill University, the Conservatoire de Trois-Rivières and the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal. Franco-Canadian contributions remained rooted in the French romantic tradition of César

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<sup>6</sup> "Achille Fortier – The Canadian Encyclopedia," last modified December 27, 2014, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/achille-fortier-emc/>.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Maurice Leclerc, "A Brief Historical Survey of Organ Music in the Province of Québec," *The American Organist*, 43, no. 3 (2009): 42-44.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Thériault, "Daveluy, Raymond," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/07261>.



Franck, Louis Vienne and others. Significant additions to French-Canadian organ literature include works by François Morel, Rachel Laurin, Jean Lebuis, Jean Morissette, Bernard Piché, Antoine Reboulot, Gilles Rioux and Denis Bédard.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the organ music written in Canada is related to either the Anglican or the Roman Catholic Church. As such, works are based either on hymns (in the British Anglican tradition) or chant (in the French Canadian Roman Catholic tradition). In addition, there is a growing body of work intended for concert performance.<sup>10</sup> The term “concert music” is not exclusive, because some pieces may be used for both concert and church performances. Laurin composed largely “concert music.” Some of her works carry descriptive titles that point to concert performance; examples include: *Scènes vosgiennes* (Scenes from the Vosges Mountains), *Etude-Caprice “Belzebuth’s Laugh,”* and *Berceuse à Pierre* (Lullaby for Pierre).

### **Biographical Background**

Born in St. Benoît des Deux-Montagnes (province of Québec), Rachel Laurin was first introduced to the organ by her mother, who was the organist at a Catholic church in the small rural village where they lived. The church had a small tracker action Casavant organ (1897) that her mother played during Sunday Mass. This was the first organ Laurin encountered. As a child, Laurin was exposed to a variety of music in her home. Her mother served as her first piano teacher when she began studying at the age of nine. Laurin’s parents encouraged the artistic

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<sup>9</sup>Canadian Music Centre, Toronto, *List of Canadian Keyboard Music: Supplementary to the 1971 Catalogue of Canadian Keyboard Music* (Toronto: Canadian Music Centre, 1976).

<sup>10</sup>MacMillan, Ernest, and Carl Morey, *MacMillan on Music: Essays on Music* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), 42-47.

activities of their daughter and, at the age of fifteen, she began composing. It did not occur to her to become an organist until she was seventeen, when she was attracted by the majestic sound of the organ and started formal organ lessons. Her organ teachers at that time were JastomArel and his wife Louisa.<sup>11</sup> Laurin decided to embark on a career in music and enrolled at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal when she was nineteen. There her teachers included Raymond Daveluy (organ, keyboard harmony and improvisation), Raoul Sosa (piano) and Nick Ayoub (jazz).<sup>12</sup> After beginning studies in keyboard harmony with her major teacher Raymond Daveluy, she showed her compositions to him and he agreed to take Laurin as a private composition student. Two years later Laurin enrolled in the organ and improvisation class with Raymond Daveluy. She recalls, “He is an intuitive and demanding teacher but with different teaching approaches to each of his pupils.”<sup>13</sup>

When she graduated from the Conservatoire, Laurin accepted the position of associate organist at the famed St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montréal as an assistant to her teacher Raymond Daveluy, a post she retained from 1987-2002. Subsequently, she was the titular organist of Notre Dame Cathedral in Ottawa from 2002-2006. Currently she is an Associate Composer for the Canadian Music Centre, an organization that helps to promote Canadian music locally and around the world. She devotes her work to her composition as well as to playing recitals and presenting classes for university and professional groups. Laurin has recorded more than twelve

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Laurin, Interview with Michael Barone, “Rachel’s Children” broadcast by American Public Media’s *PIPEDREAMS* dated October, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> “Rachel Laurin,” last modified October 5, 2014, <http://www.rachellaurin.com/home.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

albums with eight different recording labels. She has performed for a national convention of the AGO (the American Guild of Organists) and at multiple conventions of the RCCO (the Royal Canadian College of Organists), including presenting the opening gala recital at the RCCO Centennial national convention in Toronto in 2009. Her career as a concert artist includes performances of organ concerti with orchestras in Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, and Hamilton. In 2000 and 2001 she performed the complete organ symphonies of Louis Vierne in both Montréal and Ottawa. In 2012 Michael Barone, the host of American Public Radio's *Pipe Dreams* devoted an entire program to her music, entitled "Rachel's Children." To date, she has composed more than one hundred works for a variety of forces, including works for orchestra, keyboard instruments, and vocal chamber ensembles.<sup>14</sup> Her many awards include winning the Prix Conrad-Letendre, the Holtkamp-AGO Composition Award in 2008, and the Marilyn Mason New Organ Music Competition in 2009. A noted improviser, Laurin has taught the art of improvisation at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal and at the Summer School of Sacred Music in Épinal (France). Her works are published by Doberman, RCCO Music Publication (Canada), Édition Lucarel in Montréal, Hinshaw Music, Édition Épinal (France) and Wayne Leupold Editions (USA).

### **Overview of Rachel Laurin's Compositions**

Laurin's compositional output features works for a variety of different media. Her chamber music includes several string quartets, multiple works featuring violin and/or viola, as well as pieces involving winds and percussion. She has also written numerous works for piano,

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<sup>14</sup>Nicole Labelle, *Répertoire des oeuvres des compositrices du Québec au XXe siècle* (Ottawa: Centre de recherche en civilisation Canadienne- Française, Université d'Ottawa. 1997), xix.

including a sonata, a concerto, a collection entitled *Ten Pieces for the Piano* and three *Songs Without Words*. Her orchestral works include concerti for piano, for percussion, and for organ. As a vocal composer, she has written eleven choral collections including a Mass, and seven collections of solo vocal music, including a cantata based on *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

### **Collections of Vocal Music**

Works for Solo voice:

*Trois Fables, op.9*

*Cantata « Veni Creator », op.10*

*Le Nénuphar, op.12*

*Le Bestiaire, op.22*

*Trois Mélodies sur des Poèmes d'Anne Hébert, op.33*

*Psaumes, op.39 / voice and organ*

*Song Cycle “Chant pour un Québec lointain,” op.57*

*Song Cycle “Chant pour un Québec lointain”, op.70*

Choral Works:

*Trois Arrangements de Folklore, op.1-B*

*Trois Arrangements de Folklore, op.1*

*Cantique « Je te révère », op.4-B*

*Messe pour les Fêtes solennelles, op.4*

*Dix Arrangements de Cantiques, op.6-B*

*Deux Arrangements de Noël, op.7-B*

*Trois Motets en l'Honneur de la Sainte Famille*

*Messe de Louange, op.15*

*Deux Folklores, op.22-B*

- *No.1 : « C'est l'Aviron »*
- *No.2 : « Descendez à l'Ombre »*

*AdoroTe, Op.51*

*FiliaeRegum, Op.67*

### **Solo Organ Works**

Rachel Laurin's solo organ works include more than thirty-two pieces, among which are four organ transcriptions of works by Brahms, Liszt and Bach. *Suite Brève op.6, No.1*, Laurin's first solo organ work, was published by the Canadian firm Europart-Music in 1988. Within the corpus of her collected works there are a great variety of forms and genres. The solo organ works could be divided into the following categories:

#### **Suites or Collections:**

*Twelve Short Pieces* volumes 1-4

*Suite Brève, op. 6* No. 1 and No. 2

*Petite Suite sur un Motet de Gerald Bales, op. 41*

*Greensboro Suite, op. 56*

*Seven Pieces, op. 58* (Also included in the *Twelve Short Pieces, Vol. 2*)

*Suite in D Major for Don Menzies, op. 63*

#### **Free Works in Baroque or Classical Forms:**

*Sonata in F, op. 6, No. 2*

*Prelude, op. 24*

*Three Pieces, op. 31*

No. 1 – Prelude and Fugue in b minor

No. 2 – Toccata and Fugue in g minor

No. 3 – Chaconne and Fugue in e minor

*Introduction and Passacaglia, on a theme of Raymond Daveluy, op. 44*

*Prelude and Fugue in f minor, op. 45*

*Fantasy and Fugue on the Genevan Psalm 47, op. 62 (organ duet)*

*Fantasia and Fugue in D Major, op. 73*

### **Symphonic Works:**

*Symphony No. 1, op. 36*

*Symphony No. 2, op. 55*

### **Concert Etudes:**

*ÉtudeHéroïque, op. 38*

*Etude-Caprice “Belzebuth’s Laugh”, op. 66*

*Symphonic Etude for Solo Pedal, op. 73*

## **Sacred Works**

*Quatre Pèlerinages en Lorraine, op. 26*

*Variations sur un Noël Lorrain, op. 30*

*Partita on “NunDanket,” op. 47*

*Tone Poem for the Advent Season, op. 69*

## **Miscellaneous Works**

*Hommage à Lucien Daveluy, op. 13*

*Scènes vosgiennes, op. 16*

*Acclamations, op. 37*

*Epilogue, op. 50*

*Berceuse à Pierre*

## **Organ Transcriptions**

*Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, op.24, by J. Brahms*

*Sonata in B Minor, by F. Liszt*

*Concerto in D Minor, BWV 1052, by J.S. Bach*

*Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903, by J.S. Bach*

We should note that a number of the works for solo organ may also be performed on other keyboard instruments. These include *Three Bagatelles, op. 54* which are included in the *Twelve Short Pieces, Vol. 2* and may be played on organ or reed organ, and the *Partita on “Nun Danket,” op. 47* that can be played on organ, piano, or keyboard, and harpsichord.

In 2006, Laurin was named the house composer for Wayne Leupold publications in the United States. One of the agreements made between Laurin and Wayne Leupold was to write short pieces that could be published in the periodical *Organist Companion*. This has been

instrumental in her ongoing work with shorter forms, embodied in her growing body of collections entitled *Twelve Short Pieces*. To date, Laurin has written four volumes entitled *Twelve Short Pieces*, collections of short works in various styles that would be suitable as shorter recital works and sometimes useful in a church setting. Laurin states: “They allow me, as composer, and as performer, to express in a short time different aspects of my musical personality...and of my four temperaments! They also give me a favourable chance to explore different colours of the organ and to emphasize some stops neglected in longer compositions.”<sup>15</sup>

*Étude Héroïque, op.38* was commissioned as a competition piece, intended to pose technical challenges to the performer. The *Étude* opens with small thematic cells in the form of variations involving chords and octaves. Laurin presents an exposition of orchestral timbres. The composer employed some double pedaling in octaves in the final section, which challenge the performer’s pedal technique.

## **Organ and Instruments**

The music for organ and other instruments provides a platform for Rachel Laurin to write chamber music. Laurin wishes to give the organist an opportunity to perform as equal partner with other musicians instead of having only the limited role of accompanist. Laurin’s goal in composing music for organ and instruments is to employ the wide range of sonorities and

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<sup>15</sup> Rachel Laurin, *Douze courtes pièces pour orgue. Twelve Short Pieces for Organ. Volume 3* (Colfax, NC: Wayne Leupold, 2014), 2.



nuances available on each instrument.<sup>16</sup> Many of her compositions for organ and other instruments have been composed since the turn of the twenty-first century.

### **Organ and other Instruments:**

*Cantata « Veni Creator », op.10*  
voice and organ

*Acclamations, op.3*  
Arrangement for organ, 2 trumpets, 1 trombone

*Fantasia for Organ and Harp, Op.52*

*Concerto in D, Op.59*  
organ, string orchestra and timpani

*Sonata for Organ and Horn, Op.60*

*Introduction et Allegro, Op.65*  
organ and oboe

*Sonata for Organ and Horn, op.60* was commissioned by organist Karen Holmes for the 2011 National Convention of the Royal Canadian College of Organists held in Hamilton, Ontario. There are three movements: an *Allegro* in traditional sonata form with two contrasting themes; a slow movement, freely structured and descriptive in character; and a fugato in rondo form, in which the main fugal theme returns regularly as a refrain. Laurin tells the following story to contribute to the understanding of the second movement “On a Painting by Thomson”:

... wishing to stimulate my imagination in order to start writing as soon as possible, I looked through, as I sometimes do, a collection of reproductions of works of art. Because I particularly like his work, I chose a collection of works by Tom Thomson on the theme

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<sup>16</sup> Rachel Laurin, liner notes to *Music by Rachel Laurin*, Laurin, Rachel, Damian Rivers-Moore, Caroline Léonardelli, Karen Holmes, Raven, CD, 2013.

of trees. I soon found a landscape that touched me deeply, entitled “Ragged Lake”. Right away harmonies suggested themselves, a musical atmosphere was established, a melody appeared, another motif joined in: everything fell into place naturally to describe the atmosphere suggested by this lake, these clouds, this coniferous tree bent over in the foreground. But imagine my surprise when, in the middle of writing this movement, I decided to look up more information about this painting that I had been admiring for several days; of the thirty or so paintings in this book, coming from private collections, or, in the case of most of them, from the Art Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, a few minutes' walk from where I live, only one came from the Art Gallery of Hamilton: “Ragged Lake”, which I had chosen by pure coincidence! <sup>17</sup>

The *Concerto in D, op. 59 for organ, string orchestra and timpani* is one example of a major organ and orchestra work that shows Rachel Laurin's skillful handling of orchestration in coordination with the wide pallet of tone colors available on the organ.

## **French Influence**

Like all artists, composers are often influenced, especially early in their careers, by works they have studied and performed. Laurin's early organ study no doubt had a profound effect on her compositions, especially those for the organ. Laurin, like her teacher Raymond Daveluy, pursued a course of training very much in line with the tradition of Parisian late nineteenth and early twentieth-century organist-composers. The organclasses at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal studied improvisation on plainchant, fugue, and improvisation on free themes in sonata form.<sup>18</sup>In part, Laurin's compositional style is generated by her improvisation.

Techniques of melodic development include transposition, segmentation, melodic sequence, inversion, retrograde and variation. Charles Marie Widor, Louis Vierne and Marcel Dupré have

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>OrphaOchse, *Organists and Organ Playing in Nineteenth Century France and Belgium* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press. 1994), 93.

greatly influenced Laurin's harmonic language. For a sample of her symphonic writing, see example 1.

Example 1 Rachel Laurin's *Introduction and Passacaglia on a Theme by Raymond Daveluy, Op. 44*, mm. 202-203



Rachel Laurin's set of fifteen variations on the Noël "Nuitsombre" from *Variation sur un Noël Lorrain* is another example showing resemblance between her music and the music of French symphonic composers. In this work, she follows the general style of French Noël variations as exemplified by Marcel Dupré in his *Variations sur un Noël*, op.20.<sup>19</sup> See example 2.

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<sup>19</sup>Gertrude Olford, "Four Organ Recitals and an Essay: Selected Canadian Solo Organ Music, 1981-1996: Introduction and Annotated Catalogue"(PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1997).

Example 2 Rachel Laurin's *Variation sur un Noël Lorrain*, mm. 79-82

The image displays a musical score for Rachel Laurin's *Variation sur un Noël Lorrain*, measures 79-82. The score is written for piano and features three systems of music. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass line. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic marking. The music is characterized by dense, blocky chords in the upper register, often spanning multiple staves, and a more active, rhythmic bass line. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests, indicating a complex harmonic and rhythmic structure. The overall texture is dense and polyphonic, typical of a variation on a traditional theme.

Laurin writes the final variation in two sections: fugue and toccata. Marcel Dupré demonstrates the same structural outline in the final variation of his work *Variations sur un Noël*. See example 3.

Example 3 Marcel Dupré's *Variations sur un Noël*, mm. 345 - 353

Presto ♩ = 138

The musical score is written for piano and features a grand staff with three systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a forte (fff) dynamic. The second system continues the piano part with complex chordal textures. The third system shows the piano part concluding with a final chord. The bass line is a simple, rhythmic accompaniment.

A study of Laurin would be incomplete without an examination of Raymond Daveluy's aesthetic that, undoubtedly, shaped her musical language. For many reasons, Daveluy was an ideal teacher for Laurin. At a time when many composers were gravitating toward atonal or serial music, Daveluy remained very open to all techniques. He maintained that the effect of the sound was determined not only by the notes used in the chord, but also by other factors such as the reception of the audience, and the composer's own musical personality.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Laurin, interview by Shirley Cheng, Lawrence, KS, November 15, 2014.

## Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth-Century Music

On occasion, Laurin's music features passages that are very similar to works by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century composers include Sergei Rachmaninoff and Franz Liszt.

During my interview with Laurin in 2014 she said the following about Rachmaninoff:

“In my early stage of composition I would identify myself the most with Rachmaninoff. Because his [musical] language is chromatic and colorful, I love his music. And I felt he depicts the landscape very well that makes a link to the Canadian landscape.”

Likewise, Laurin's music exhibits affinities with the music of Franz Liszt. It is probably no coincidence that Laurin has transcribed Liszt's Sonata in B minor for the organ. One example of these affinities is the use of chromatic thirds to underscore a melody and decorate the harmony. We can compare Laurin's *Étude Héroïque* (mm.59-60; 63-64) and Liszt's organ work *Variation on Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* for the pattern of use of chromatic thirds and thick sonorities. See examples 4 and 5.

Example 4 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm.59-60

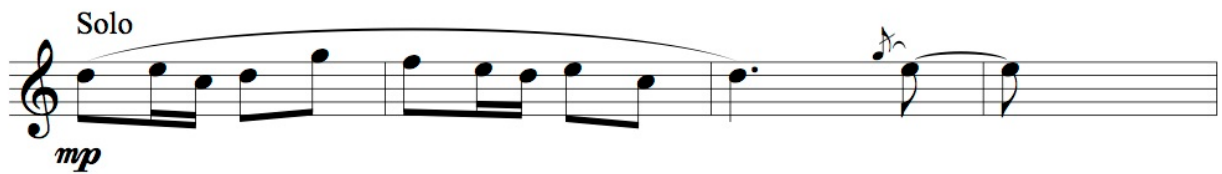
Example 4 shows a musical score for Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, measures 59-60. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass staff. The right hand plays a series of chords and eighth notes, while the left hand plays a bass line with eighth notes. The tempo marking *leggiero* is present above the left hand staff.

Example 5 Franz Liszt's *Variation on Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, mm. 78-79

Example 5 shows a musical score for Franz Liszt's *Variation on Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, measures 78-79. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass staff. The right hand plays a series of chords and eighth notes, while the left hand plays a bass line with eighth notes. The tempo marking *Andante* is present above the right hand staff.

Although Laurin did not discuss the influence on her compositional style from Stravinsky, there is a possible example of the direct influence of Stravinsky. In Laurin’s “On a Painting by Thomson,” Laurin evokes features of Stravinsky’s French horn melody, “Dances of the Youths and Maidens,” from the *Rite of Spring*.” See example 6 and example 7.

Example 6 Igor Stravinsky’s French horn melody from *Rite of Spring* (Rehearsal 25)



Example 7 Rachel Laurin’s *On a Painting by Thomson*, mm. 5-7

Both musical passages use Eb-F-G-A-Bb-C-Db — a rotation of the acoustic or melodic minor scale — as the primary scalar environment, or “macroharmony,” for their respective melodies.

## German Influence

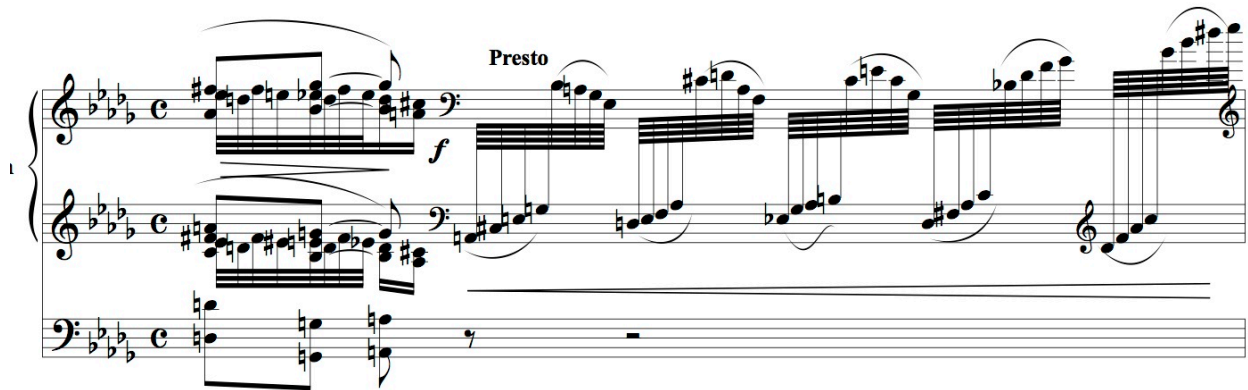


Laurin's *Chromatic Fantasietta*, is reminiscent of Max Reger's *Fantasia and Fugue on the name BACH*. In particular we see Reger-style improvisatory passages and chromaticism in Laurin's introduction. While both Laurin and her teacher's style derive unmistakably from the French school, counterpoint in the style of the German Baroque is clearly evident throughout their works. Exposure to the organ music of J.S Bach came from Laurin's formative years of musical training. Laurin's many fugues show her indebtedness to German Baroque music, in particular to the music of Bach. Her *Chromatic Fantasietta* bears a strong thematic and textual resemblance to Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, BWV 903*. See examples 8,9 and 10.

Example 8 Rachel Laurin's *Chromatic Fantasietta*, mm. 1-3

The musical score for Rachel Laurin's *Chromatic Fantasietta*, measures 1-3, is presented in a grand staff format. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The score begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a legato articulation. The first system shows the right hand with a chromatic scale and the left hand with a similar pattern. The second system continues the chromatic movement. The third system, marked 'liberamente e virtuoso', shows a more complex texture with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a forte (*f*) dynamic in the right hand, and a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic in the left hand. The score is written for piano with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass line.

Example 9 Max Reger's *Phantasie und Fuge über den Namen B-A-C-H*, mm. 6



Example 10 J. S. Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*, BWV 903, mm. 74-77



### Structural Function in Rachel Laurin's Music

One of the purposes of this study is to use the principles of structural function to search for formal organization (structure) in selected works by Rachel Laurin. Structural functions are those organizing factors that help to define musical form. The comprehension of formal

organization in music is dependent on a general perception of unity. Lester states, “Musical form is the unity that arises from the marriage of all aspects of a composition.”<sup>21</sup> The authors of *Basic Principles of Music Theory* add, “We may identify the principal functions of various sections of a musical work as introduction, presentation, transition, development, and conclusion.”<sup>22</sup>

Tonal and harmonic components are crucial elements in regard to establishing structural function. Tonal components define relationships to a tonal center. Tonality may be implied by note repetition, note duration, scale use, or prominence of a particular note. Many conventional studies of musical form rely on tonality to define musical form. However, there is a large body of twentieth-century music that conveys a sense of tonality without tonality serving as the primary governing factor. Rachel Laurin writes in a style that seems to suggest functional and traditional tonal schemes. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that Laurin is open to this more broadly defined view of the relationship between tonality and form.

As in her other compositions with fantasia-style introductions, the opening of the *Chromatic Fantasetta* (from the *Twelve Short Pieces*, vol. 3) represents Laurin’s abstract compositional style. The work was written in C minor. Laurin established the tonal center by closing the opening statement with a half cadence. Through scalar and chromatic transposition, Laurin wrote the second appearance of the opening statement a fourth higher, beginning with an F minor chord and concluded with a C major chord. The dynamic climax is reached when the

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<sup>21</sup> Joel Lester, *Analytic Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 63.

<sup>22</sup> William Brandt and others, eds., *The Comprehensive Study of Music, Volume VI: Basic Principle of Music Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 49.

opening statement is heard for the third time in measure 26. There are three other expositions that are derived from a new harmonization of the opening statement. See example 11.

Example 11 Rachel Laurin's *Chromatic Fantasietta*, mm. 26-27



*Scherzetto (Twelve Short Pieces, volume 3)* is in ternary form (ABA) in the key of G major. The brief A section is a duo. The B section contrasts with the chorale-like melody. It is followed by a transition that uses motivic material derived from the eighth notes of the original A section, leading to a return of the entire opening A section prior to the presentation of the brief codetta.

In *Étude Héroïque*, one sees the mature Laurin. The formal dimensions of the piece are tightly controlled. See Table 1 for a structural outline of the *Étude Héroïque*.

Table 1. Structural Outline for *Étude Héroïque*

Measure	Section	Description
1-14	Introduction	Sectional

15-26	Bridge	Pedal solo
27-37	Theme A	G Major descending scale
38-48	Bridge	Manual solo
49-66	Theme B	Rhythmic ostinato
67-76	Bridge	A-flat diatonic
77-85	Theme C	Fanfare – like subject
86-94	Theme B	Rhythmic ostinato
95-106	Bridge	Variation on Theme A
107-112	Re-statement of the Introduction	Sectional
113-130	Development	Thick symphonic writing
131-142	Coda	Parallel 4ths and Tritones  Conclusion in E Major

### Harmonic analysis of Laurin's organ works

In an era in which many composers are working in post-tonal idioms, Rachel Laurin exhibits a definite turn back toward a traditional tonal language. There are certain harmonic features that Rachel Laurin uses quite often in her music. Parallelism is a commonly used device, most often involving parallel thirds, fourths, or sixths. "On a Painting by Thomson" begins with an accompanying motive in parallel thirds. Laurin's setting of the *Asian Legend* uses parallelism in connection with its pentatonic melody. See example 12.

Example 12 Rachel Laurin's *Asian Legend*, mm. 7-10



The first entry of the pentatonic melody in measure seven is presented in parallel octaves in the manuals. There are four other appearances of this four-measure theme, in m. 13-16, which are transposed a fifth above in the left hand part. Again, the four-measures melody is repeated an octave higher in m. 22-24. Presentation of the theme in G-flat Major occurs at m. 28-32. Measure 36-37 is a transposed fragment of the theme presented in the Aeolian mode.

One of the most extensive uses of parallelism occurs in *Toccatarina* where Laurin uses seventh-chords, quartal sonorities and fuller tertian and non-tertian chords in parallel motion. See example 13.

Example 13 Rachel Laurin's *Toccatarina*, mm. 44-47



Laurin's masterful manipulation of the dense texture helps shape this brief but effective work.

"On a Painting by Thomson" opens with a theme characterized by extended arpeggiated figures and a singing-like quality. Both the French horn's cantabile line (stated in a different key center than the opening key signature) and its organ accompaniment are tertian-based. The musical notes collection from measure two is equivalent to an ascending B-flat melodic minor scale. The ascending B-flat melodic minor can also be considered as an "acoustic scale" in the E-flat major tonal center. This demonstrates Laurin's use of melodic minor as part of her vocabulary of tonal harmony. See example 15.

Example 15 Rachel Laurin's *On a Painting by Thomson*, mm. 1-12

Andante Espressivo ♩ = 88

Organ

B-flat melodic minor

The musical score is for Rachel Laurin's *On a Painting by Thomson*, measures 1-12. It is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The tempo is Andante Espressivo (♩ = 88). The score is for Organ and Piano. The organ part consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the organ part with a red box highlighting the B-flat melodic minor scale. The second and third systems show the organ part with a red box highlighting the B-flat melodic minor scale. The piano part consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the piano part with a red box highlighting the B-flat melodic minor scale. The second and third systems show the piano part with a red box highlighting the B-flat melodic minor scale.

“On a Painting by Thomson” refers to Dmitri Tymoczko’s theory of “extended common practice” scalar composition, where the B-flat melodic minor collection is used in a tonal



context, but the “common practice” tonic pitch is not the one that is tonicized.<sup>23</sup> This makes the harmonic home slightly ambiguous. The music suddenly shifts to C diatonic in m. 21. It moves through an ascending progression from C to A flat diatonic and F sharp diatonic. The more dramatic shift occurs at the *Più mosso* section, where the music does not use closely related scales. The transition of the parallel fifth accompaniment figure creates an ethereal effect. See example 16.

Example 16 Rachel Laurin’s *On a Painting by Thomson*, mm. 57-61

The return of the opening theme enables the music to rest in E-flat Major.

Different composers embrace ambiguity for all sorts of reasons. In similar fashion to the earlier example from “On a Painting by Thomson,” Laurin also demonstrates tonal ambiguity in *Étude Héroïque*. The opening passage suggests E minor, which is intensified by suspensions and

<sup>23</sup>Dmitri Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music: Harmony and Counterpoint in the Extended Common Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123-140.

other nonchord tones. There is no authentic cadence in E minor after the opening. Meanwhile the E minor pedal solo pattern in measure 15-21 could be perceived as having a “cadential function,” an association of certain pitches and rhythms with the characteristic of an ending.

Theme A appears at the *Marcato* section (mm. 27), while the manual plays a series of dotted rhythms over a G descending scale. Theme B (mm. 81) explores a fanfare-like subject with statements of quick and staccato sonorities. See example 17.

Example 17 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm. 81-82



The *Giocoso* section emphasizes a new tonal center of G at measure 95, the beginning of which outlines an e minor chord (E-G-B) over a descending G Major scale. Its thematic idea is derived from the harmony of theme A with the addition of contrasting elements, such as common intervals, scales, and harmonies that produce the impression of unity. *Étude Héroïque* is a sectional work that begins in diatonic fashion, but moves on to a more chromatic context as the music develops. See example 18.

Example 18 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm. 138



The melodic structure of the coda consists of chromatic scales. The perfect fourths and tritones form the basic harmonic structure of the passage. Although the final cadence of the piece is unusual, in that it juxtaposes a C minor-minor seventh chord with the tonic triad of E major, this cadence is still convincing because the E-flat can be understood enharmonically as the leading tone of E, offering a surprisingly strong conclusion for the piece.<sup>24</sup> See example 19

Example 19 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm. 141-143



<sup>24</sup>Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and Account of its Precedents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 60-64

As we see in the specific analyses, chord function is independent of chord quality. The perception of key is so ambiguous that the Roman numeral system may not be helpful in analyzing the music.

### Rhythmic devices

Rhythmic devices such as the combination of strict ostinato with freer phrases bring a sense of freshness and spontaneity to the *Étude Héroïque*. The rhythmic pattern of the pedal solo that Laurin used in *Étude Héroïque* (mm. 15, 22 and 23) resembles the pattern of the manual solo found in m. 38-47: four sixteenth notes in groups of two, which creates an *ostinato* pattern. See examples 20 and 21.

Example 20 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm. 15



In both classical and jazz styles, an ostinato pattern or rhythm may be repeated in strict fashion or varied; in the case of a rhythmic *ostinato*, patterns may transform in subtle ways while keeping the essence of the rhythmic *ostinato*.<sup>25</sup> Second, dotted rhythms are another feature in this piece; a similar pattern can also be found in the *Chromatic Fantasetta* (Twelve Short Pieces, vol. 3) See example 22.

Example 22 Rachel Laurin's *Chromatic Fantasetta*, mm. 12-13



The rhythmic pulse of the improvisation section in *Chromatic Fantasetta* is free and highly irregular. It also employs similar rhythmic patterns that have a unifying effect in this work.

## Performance Issues

## Organ Registration

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<sup>25</sup>Laure Schnapper, "Ostinato." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20547>.

Rachel Laurin's approach to the organ in her composition is traditional. All of the music selected for study contains specific registration suggestions. Sometimes specific suggestions are augmented with more general dynamic indications. Laurin is fond of contrasting thicker and thinner textures, the full organ and lighter ensembles, solo reeds and soft strings or flutes. To replicate all of these changes on the organ, discrete terraced (and sometimes sudden) timbre/ stop changes require the addition or subtraction of stops along with manual changes.

One example is found in her "On a Painting by Thomson." Laurin calls for mixtures and reeds in measure 44 and later *atutti* on the Swell division, which could result in a sound that covers the French horn. See example 23

Example 23 Rachel Laurin's *On a Painting by Thomson*, mm. 46-48

The performer must be sensitive to the relative dynamic level needed to realize each successive phrase and judge its appropriateness in relation to the dynamic called for in the



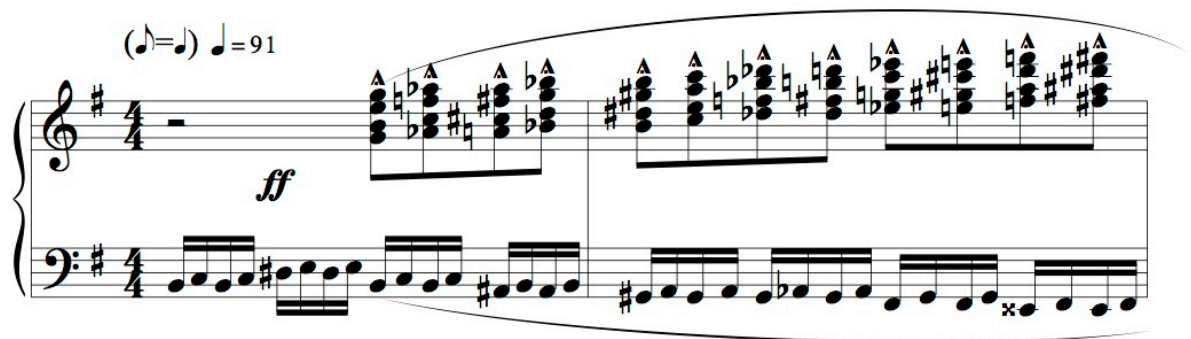
French horn part. Laurin is careful to add that performers are free to explore other options that may sound better on a particular instrument.<sup>26</sup>

## Articulation

Examination of Rachel Laurin's scores reveals pattern in her use of slur markings. Some of the slurs raise questions and problems for performance. A slur groups two or more notes into a unit, which may constitute a motive, a subject or a phrase. There are places in the *Étude Héroïque* in which slur marks indicate an easily executed legato connection. Furthermore, Laurin uses slurs above detached chords, sometimes contrasting them with a legato treatment of the pedal melody. One of Laurin's favorite uses of detached chordal writing is for festive, exclamatory settings. These phrase marks from *Étude Héroïque* function more as a guide to where the musical thought begins and ends rather than an indication to connect each chord completely.

<sup>27</sup> See example 24.

Example 24 Rachel Laurin's *Étude Héroïque*, mm. 25-26



<sup>26</sup> Rachel Laurin, interview by Shirley Cheng, Lawrence, KS, November 15, 2014

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Laurin writes her music in such a way that her intentions are obvious to the performer: the staccato dot indicates the greatest spacing between notes; no mark implies a normal legato touch and connection between notes, and the tenuto mark indicates the least space between notes while not connecting them.

## **Conclusions**

This project has addressed only a small segment of work composed by Rachel Laurin. The expressive dimensions of her works are formed in part by her embrace of both French and German musical styles. Other factors include her creative skill in improvisation, her technical ability and musical insights. Each of these contributes directly to the type of music she composed.

Many of Laurin's pieces express the lush Romanticism common to twentieth-century French organ composers. Laurin works towards the symphonic style popularized by French organ masters as well as the Baroque forms of chorale prelude and fugue. Most of her extended compositions possess the dense texture typical of Romantic organ pieces. This texture is created through thick registrations, octave doubling and pianistic figurations.

Her contribution to organ literature in Canada and beyond is significant. Her compositional voice calls the organ world back to its roots in modal, tonal language and reinvigorates a traditional approach to organ composition.



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